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REVIEWS AND ABSTRACTS OF LITERATURE

Mechanisms of Character Formation. WILLIAM A. WHITE. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1916. Pp. ii + 342.

We are indebted to a distinguished psychiatrist for this interesting book, the first comprehensive exposition of Freudianism from the pen of an American. The work bears the subtitle *An Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, and in the preface the writer states that, following Sigmund Freud, the "real creator" of the new psychology, he will attempt "to lay down the broad principles which underlie human behavior." Apparently the writer's theme waxes more ambitious as he proceeds, for in the concluding chapter he writes: "I have tried to draw a picture of man that gave him his placement in the scheme of things and did not endeavor to separate him from other living beings nor from the forces of nature in general. In other words, I have tried to show that he was only one of the multitudinous manifestations of life and even that the general laws of energy, as they apply in the inorganic world, are also applicable here" (p. 330). In reality what the writer has given us, therefore, is a rather crude and sketchy philosophy of energy from the standpoint of Freudian psychology. The inference lies close to hand that the philosophy of the book is an outgrowth of the notion of energy so prominent in the *Affekttheorien* of both Freud and the Zurich school.

The reviewer finds it difficult to give a critical estimate of this book, though he has read it with interest and profit. This is due in part to the writer's failure to draw any sharp line of demarcation between matters of fact and philosophical speculation or poetical fancy; the book abounds in fanciful, though often interesting analogies, and in sweeping philosophical generalizations. Another difficulty is offered by the matter of the book itself. Apparently it is the work of a medical specialist who finds in Freudianism a convenient instrument for cementing into something like a system the results of wide reading and catholicity of interests. The facts of comparative, individual, and abnormal psychology, physiology and neurology, anthropology, comparative mythology, the physical sciences as well as philosophy and art are laid under tribute for material wherewith to illustrate the Freudian theses. Back of this more or less heterogeneous material and serving to give it a quasi-metaphysical unity is the notion of a creative energy or *libido*, conceived now in terms of Nietzsche's "will to power" (p. 190), now in terms of Bergson's *élan vital* (p. 42). This unfolding *libido* gives rise to conflict (Ch. IV.), "the very root and source of life" (p. 63). Con-

sciousness arises out of the necessity for resolving this conflict, and the unconscious (Ch. III.) which far surpasses the conscious both in content and importance, is the result of the accumulations of the past experience of the psyche, phylogenetic as well as individual. The unconscious is composed of submerged wishes or tendencies that oppose efforts at adjustment (p. 120). The *libido*, as found in these submerged wishes of the unconscious life, appears only in the form of symbols (Ch. V.), the real meaning of which is veiled. It is in the dream-life (Ch. VI.) that the mechanism of the unconscious phase of the psyche can best be studied, for the dream is "a wish-fulfilling dramatization" (p. 142).

In a curious chapter on "the family romance" the writer describes the efforts of the *libido* in the individual to make the transition from "infantile attachments to adulthood" (p. 148). Much in this, as well as the two succeeding chapters on the "will to power," is purely fanciful. We are told, for example, that at birth the child is thrust from a "state of comfortable and unconditioned omnipotence"; its first cry is an "expression of a desire to return to the uterus" (p. 178). Incest, therefore, in the adult is but an expression of this primordial infantile sexual impulse (*sic*) to return to the state of "comfortable and unconditioned omnipotence" (p. 155), whatever that may mean. Much suggestive material is contained in the chapters on extroversion and introversion, organ inferiority and resolution of the conflict.

On the whole, Dr. White's book shows wide learning and offers much interesting material, but lacks logical coherence and exactness of terminology and is marred occasionally by slovenly English (pp. 15, 40, 91, 152). In spite of its subtitle, *An Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, it hardly meets that need as successfully as Hitschmann's *Freud's Theories of the Neuroses*, recently made accessible to English readers;¹ neither does it possess the incisiveness and clarity of Professor Holt's brilliant little book, *The Freudian Wish*. The value of Dr. White's contribution lies rather in the light it throws upon the many affiliations of Freudianism with contemporary thought and especially with philosophy. For the chief attraction of the book is the note of broad and sympathetic humanism running through it, born, doubtless, of the intimate acquaintance with the hopes and fears, the darling ambitions, the passionate loyalties, and the pathetic illusions of human hearts enjoyed only by the priest or the physician.

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¹ Moffatt, Yard, and Company, New York, 1917.